

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Comparing the Apparel Shopping Behaviors Between Fast Fashion
Consumers and Sustainable Consumers**

A Thesis Submitted to the

University Honors Program

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements of the Baccalaureate Degree

With Upper Division Honors

School of

Family, Consumer, and Nutrition Science

By

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DeKalb, Illinois

May 2012

University Honors Program


Capstone Approval Page

Capstone Title (print or type)

Comparing the Apparel Shopping Behaviors Between
Fast Fashion Consumers and Sustainable
Consumers

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Date of Approval (print or type) _____

HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to compare apparel shopping behaviors between fast-fashion consumers and sustainable consumers. A self-administered questionnaire was developed to measure apparel purchase decision-making criteria, fashion innovativeness, and impulsiveness. A total of 79 college students completed the survey. The results indicated that there were significant differences in apparel purchase decision-making criteria regarding color, style, quality, and trend between fast-fashion and sustainable consumers. Findings also showed that while there were differences in fashion-innovativeness, no differences were found in impulsiveness between the groups. Based on the findings, suggestions and limitations of the study were discussed.

HONORS THESIS ABSTRACT THESIS SUBMISSION FORM

AUTHOR: Kassandra Clanton

THESIS TITLE: Comparing the Apparel Shopping Behaviors Between Fast Fashion Consumers and Sustainable Consumers

ADVISOR: Dr. Joung

ADVISOR'S DEPARTMENT: Family, Consumer, and Nutrition Studies

DISCIPLINE: Textile, Apparel, and Merchandising

YEAR: 2012

PAGE LENGTH: 11

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Yes

ILLUSTRATED: No

PUBLISHED (YES OR NO): No

LIST PUBLICATION: NA

COPIES AVAILABLE (HARD COPY, MICROFILM, DISKETTE):

ABSTRACT (100-200 WORDS):

Introduction

As Global Warming becomes a “hot topic” in society, more and more retailers are turning to environmentally friendly practices. Catering to the demand of consumers, apparel companies are creating products that are sustainable or support sustainable movements. More effort is put into creating less waste and recycling. Apparel companies are researching ways to recycle items, such as plastic, and turn it into usable fibers for fabric. Also, more and more factories and retail stores are trying to conserve energy through using more efficient lighting and more efficiently using resources. Consumers are also joining along on this movement. Currently it is trendy to buy “eco-friendly” items such as organic cotton t-shirts or secondhand clothing. Consumers take part in recycling paper and other items, such as plastic. People are more efficiently planning their shopping trips and use of their cars in order to cut back on gas consumption. This new booming consumer group could be categorized as green consumers.

Green consumers are “individuals looking to protect themselves and their world through the power of their purchase decisions” (Kim and Damhorst, 1998, p. 126). They want to help protect their environment and do so through changing their behaviors. Sustainable consumers, or green consumers, are those consumers seek information about where the product was made, where the money goes, what resources were used, and how they plan on using the product. They are more likely to buy items that say organic and they prefer things made of natural materials. They are very cautious about the environment and want to reduce their impact that they could have on it.

While there is a trend towards being a more environmentally aware society, the apparel industry is moving toward fast-fashions. Fast-fashion is the process by which going from idea to the retail store is sped up to match demand. Fast-fashion is inexpensive, trendy fashion products (e.g, clothing) that has a short life cycle. It tends to last a couple weeks and then disappears from the market quickly. Stores such as H&M, Forever 21, and Zara are good examples of fast-fashion retailers. Because of its trendiness and inexpensiveness, young consumers purchase fast fashions (Joung and Park-Poaps, 2011). Usually these items are more inexpensive versions of the trendy runway styles. Studies have also indicated that fast-fashion consumers are impulse buyers (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009).

While the apparel industry and consumers have some concerns about the environment, they also support fast fashion. Because of these current trends, there are two different types of consumers: sustainable consumers and fast-fashion consumers. However, little is known about these two consumers in terms of decision making criteria for apparel purchase, fashion-innovativeness, and impulsive buying. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate whether there are any differences in apparel purchase decision making criteria, fashion innovativeness, and impulsiveness between fast-fashion and sustainable consumers.

Literature Review

Apparel Purchase Decision-Making Criteria

With many different options in products to choose from what makes a consumer choose one over another? A consumer's decision making style, is their mental orientation that characterizes their approach to making choices (Wang, Sui, and Hui, 2004). When a consumer decides to make a purchase, they tend to focus on the "brand, style, design, color, price, and country-of-origin" (Wang, Sui, and Hui, 2004, pg. 241). One researcher has suggested that there are typologies of consumers that fit a profile for decision making (Bae and Miller, 2009). Evaluating products tends to be most realistic when consumers can actually feel and touch the object they are evaluating (Eckman, Damhorst, and Kadolph, 1990). Some criteria that consumers find important are "values, store preferences, shopping behaviors, and other lifestyle characteristics" (Eckman, Damhorst, and Kadolph, 1990, p. 13). All the sensory information and general knowledge available to consumers, it all falls into four categories, aesthetics, usefulness, performance, and extrinsic criteria (Eckman, Damhorst, and Kadolph, 1990). Of those categories the things that are intrinsic, or observable, are most often used by consumers (Eckman, Damhorst, and Kadolph, 1990). Overall, though, color and fit are the two most evaluated criteria and with that information it is important that marketers highlight these to push consumers into buyers (Eckman, Damhorst, and Kadolph, 1990). This study was developed to compare apparel purchase decision-making criteria between fast-fashion and sustainable consumers in order to figure out what each group takes into consideration when purchasing apparel.

This information will be helpful when advertising and marketing to fast-fashion and sustainable consumers.

Fashion Innovativeness

A fashion innovator is one who, "is among the first buyers of new items and whose reaction to new products can determine success or failure of that item" (Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin, 1999, pg. 7). Some characteristics that tend to define innovators are that they tend to; have more income, be more educated, be young, be risk taking, be more involved in social events, and be women (Ha and Stoel, 2004). A previous study by Ronald Goldsmith, showed that innovators tend to look at themselves as "excitable, indulgent, contemporary, colorful, dominating, and vain when compared to fashion followers" (Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin, 1999, pg. 8). Because these innovators are so crucial to industry marketers try to directly target this group of consumers (Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin, 1999). Many studies have shown that the success or failure of a product is derived from its acceptance by those consumers that are 'fashion innovators' (Morgan and Birtwistle, 2009). All in all consumers tend to match their products to their own personalities. Fashion innovativeness is important to study because they influence other consumers. This study looks to examine this information on fashion innovativeness for the fast-fashion and sustainable consumer group.

Impulsiveness

Impulsive buying can be defined as a “sudden, spontaneous act which precludes thoughtful consideration of all available information” (Lin and Chuang, 2005, pg. 552). Impulsive buying is also defined as “a consumer’s tendency to buy spontaneously, unreflectively, immediately, and kinetically (Rook and Fisher, 1995, pg. 73). According to Rook and Fisher (1995), the consumers that tend to be impulsive tend to “have open shopping list” and buy things based on gratification (p.72). Impulsive purchases account for up to 80 percent of all purchases in a category (Lin and Chuang, 2005). Since the majority of purchases are based on impulse, it has a major impact on the market. The strong, sudden urge that comes over a person that makes them want to buy something is the aspect of consumer behavior that makes decisions spontaneous (Punj, 2010). Studies have indicated that fast-fashion consumers tend to be impulsive (Rook and Fisher, 1995). However, little is known about sustainable consumers’ impulsiveness. This study was developed to compare impulsiveness between fast-fashion and sustainable consumers.

Based on the review of literature, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: There will be differences in the following decision making criteria between fast-fashion consumers and sustainable consumers.

H1a: Color

H1b: Style/Design

H1c: Trend/Fashion

H1d: Size/Fit

H1e: Fabric

H1f: Quality of Workmanship

H1g: Country of Origin

H1h: Price

H1i: Comfort

H1j: Brand/Designer Name

H1k: Ease of Care/ Maintenance

H1l: Durability

H2: There will be differences in fashion innovativeness between fast-fashion consumers and sustainable consumers.

H3: There will be differences in impulsive buying between fast-fashion consumers and sustainable consumers.

Method

Data Collection Instrument

A self-administered survey questionnaire was developed to measure six components: 1) apparel shopping lifestyle, 2) apparel purchase decision making criteria, 3) fashion-innovativeness, 4) impulsiveness, 5) fast-fashion consumption, and 6) sustainable consumption. Demographic information was also asked. The survey has 4 questions regarding apparel shopping lifestyle that is categorized by the number of purchases and the frequency of shopping behavior. For apparel purchase decision-making criteria, 12 items (color, style, trend, fit, fabric, quality of workmanship, country of origin, price, comfort, brand, ease of care, and durability) were asked to indicate their level of

importance using a five point scale ranging from not very important to very important. For fashion innovativeness, six questions were adopted from the Domain Specific Innovativeness scale (Goldsmith and Hofacker, 1991) using a five point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. For impulsiveness, nine items were adopted from Buying Innovativeness scales (Rook and Fisher, 1995) and measured using a five point likert scale (1 strongly disagree, to 5 strongly agree). For sustainability, eight questions were adopted from the Environmental Concern and Apparel Consumption scale (Kim and Damhorst, 1998). The survey was handed out randomly on the NIU college campus. The majority of respondents were approached in the library. Finally the SPSS program was used to summarize the data and to test the hypothesis.

Results & Findings

The Sample

A total of 79 survey questionnaires were used for this study. Of the sample, the majority (77.2%) of the sample was aged between 19 and 22. Males composed 32.9% of the sample, while the other 67.1% were females. The most frequent race was white at 84.8%. Unmarried singles made up 94.9%. The majority of the sample (65.9%) were upper-class undergrads, or juniors and seniors.

Apparel Shopping Behavior

On average, the respondents purchased clothing 6 times a month, 25-29 apparel products a year, and they spend \$400-\$500 on clothing a year. The majority (89.9%) of the sample said that they did shop at fast-fashion retailers such as H&M, Zara, and Gap.

Furthermore, they indicated that they purchase about 16 to 20 apparel items at these retailers a year. Regarding sustainable consumption behavior (39.2%) said that they bought organic and/or eco-friendly products. They purchased sustainable products 1 to 5 items a year.

Hypotheses Testing

H1a: For decision-making regarding the importance of color, results indicated that means for sustainable consumers (\bar{M} = 4.32) and for fast-fashion consumers (\bar{M} = 3.92). T-statistic showed that there was a significant difference between sustainable and fast-fashion consumers in importance of color when purchasing apparel (t = 2.18, $p < 0.05$), which means H1a was supported.

H1b: For decision-making regarding the importance of style, results indicated that means for sustainable consumers (\bar{M} = 4.29) and for fast-fashion consumers (\bar{M} = 3.54). T-statistic showed that there was a significant difference between sustainable and fast-fashion consumers in importance of style when purchasing apparel (t = 3.00, $p < 0.05$), which means H1b was supported.

H1c: For decision-making regarding the importance of trend, results indicated that means for sustainable consumers (\bar{M} = 3.84) and for fast-fashion consumers (\bar{M} = 3.21). T-statistic showed that there was a significant difference between sustainable and fast-fashion consumers in importance of trend when purchasing apparel (t = 2.23, $p < 0.05$), which means H1c was supported.

H1f: For decision-making regarding the importance of quality, results indicated that means for sustainable consumers (\bar{M} = 3.68) and for fast-fashion consumers (\bar{M} = 3.08). T-

statistic showed that there was a significant difference between sustainable and fast-fashion consumers in importance of quality when purchasing apparel ($t = 2.49$, $p < 0.05$), which means H1a was supported.

H1d,e,g,h,i,j,k,l: There were no significant differences found between sustainable consumers and fast fashion consumers regarding size, fabric, country of origin, price, comfort, brand, care, and durability.

H2: For hypothesis 2, results indicated that the means for sustainable consumers ($\bar{M} = 3.6$) and for fast-fashion consumers ($\bar{M} = 2.8$). T-statistic showed that there was a significant difference between these two consumer groups in fashion innovativeness ($t = 0.955$, $p < 0.01$).

H3: For hypothesis 3, results of the t-statistic showed there was no difference in impulsiveness between fast-fashion consumers and sustainable consumers thus hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Conclusions/ Implications

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not there was differences between sustainable consumers and fast-fashion consumers in apparel decision-making criteria, fashion innovativeness, and impulsiveness.

For decision-making criteria, fast-fashion consumers place a higher value on color. This is because of the fact that with every season there are new popular colors and since they are buying more popular items they want variance in color. Sustainable consumers on the other hand, tend to buy more organic fabrics and products with more environmentally friendly dyes, which happen to be duller colors that come in a lesser variety. Style and

trend were also a criteria that varied among the two groups of respondents. Once again, fast-fashion consumers look at the style and trend as a way to portray the current "look", whereas sustainable consumers like classic styles that will last longer and will not need to be replaced as quickly. Quality is a factor that one would expect to vary between fast-fashion and sustainable consumers. This is because fast-fashion consumers are willing to put quality on the back burner since they are more likely to get rid of their apparel more quickly and more often in order to make room for new items. Sustainable consumers, on the other hand, want items that will last a long time and have good quality work used to make them.

The reason why criteria like fit and comfort were not shown to have a difference between the two groups would be because everyone wants to look good in their clothing and feel comfortable regardless of what items they purchase. The economy could be one of the reasons why price and brand name didn't show much difference. Due to the current events and the weakening of the economy most people reduce the amount that they spend on apparel, hence most respondents put a high emphasis on price as an important decision-making criteria. Surprisingly however country-of-origin did not show any difference. One would infer that sustainable consumers would be more likely to look at the country as a way to judge sustainable ethical information about where the product came from.

Regarding fashion innovativeness, there was also a major difference between the two groups of consumers. Since fast-fashion consumers want the newest, popular trends, they try to be more innovative. They look to sources of inspiration, like celebrities and

magazines, so that they can have the cool new apparel products before their peers.

Sustainable consumers do not care as much about the being the first to have a new trend, therefor they tend to be less innovative.

An interesting finding was that there was no difference between fast-fashion consumers and sustainable consumers in impulsive buying. However, previous studies (Lin and Chaung, 2005, and Rook and Fisher 1995), found that fast-fashion consumers should be more impulsive when compared to sustainable consumers.

The findings suggest that when marketing to sustainable consumers, companies should emphasize quality. The sustainable consumer is willing to pay more for items that are made of quality materials. On the other hand, fast-fashion consumers are more willing to pay attention to color, trend, and style. They want to be up to date and advertisers can highlight that throughout their ads and the retailers should include these items in their stores.

It should be noted that this study has some limitations. The sample was selected from an university so the sample was limited in its scope. More research, and perhaps a larger, more random sample should be used to confirm our results.

Appendix A: Survey

Consumer Survey: Apparel Shopping

Directions: Please circle the number that best matches your response.

1. How many times do you purchase apparel products (e.g., clothing, shoes, handbags, etc.) during a typical month?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+

2. How often do you shop for apparel products during a typical month?

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10+

3. Approximately how many items of apparel products do you **PURCHASE** a year?

- | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------|----------|----------|
| a. Fewer than 5 | b. 5-9 | c. 10-14 | d. 15-19 |
| e. 20-24 | f. 25-29 | g. 30-34 | h. 35-39 |
| i. 40-49 | j. 50 or more | | |

4. When you purchase apparel products, approximately how much do you **SPEND** in a year?

- | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------------|----------------|
| a. Less than \$100 | b. 100-\$199 | c. \$200-\$299 | d. \$300-\$399 |
| e. \$400-\$499 | f. \$500-\$599 | g. \$600-\$699 | h. \$700-\$799 |
| i. \$800-\$899 | j. \$900-\$999 | k. \$1,000 and over | |

Directions: Please circle the number that best matches your response on a 5-point scale (1= Not Very Important; 5= Very Important).

5. How important are the following criteria to you when making an apparel purchase?

	Not Very Important			Very Important	
a) Color	1	2	3	4	5
a) Style/Design	1	2	3	4	5
a) Trend/Fashion	1	2	3	4	5
	Not Very Important			Very Important	
a) Size/Fit	1	2	3	4	5
a) Fabric (e.g. cotton, wool, polyester, etc.)	1	2	3	4	5
a) Quality of Workmanship	1	2	3	4	5
a) Country of Origin	1	2	3	4	5
a) Price	1	2	3	4	5
a) Comfort	1	2	3	4	5
a) Brand/Designer Name	1	2	3	4	5
a) Ease of Care/Maintenance	1	2	3	4	5
a) Durability	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please circle the number that best reflects your agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree).

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
6. In general, I am among the first in my circle of friends to buy a new fashion (e.g., clothing) when it appears.	1	2	3	4	5
7. If I heard that a new fashion was available in the store, I would be interested enough to buy it.	1	2	3	4	5

8. Compared to my friends I own a few of fashions.	1	2	3	4	5
9. In general, I am the last in my circle of friends to know the titles/brands of the latest fashion.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I will not buy a new fashion if I haven't heard/tried it yet.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I like to buy fashions before other people do.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please circle the number that best reflects your agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree).

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
12. I often buy things spontaneously.	1	2	3	4	5
13. "Just do it" describes the way I buy things.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I often buy things without thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
15. "I see it, I buy it" describes me.	1	2	3	4	5
16. "Buy now, think about it later" describes me.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Sometimes I feel like buying things on the spur of the moment.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I buy things according to how I feel at the moment.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I carefully plan most of my purchases.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Sometimes I am a bit reckless about what I buy.	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please circle your level of agreement with each statement.

21. Have you shopped or purchased apparel products in fast-fashion stores (e.g., H&M, Zara, Forever 21, Gap, Top Shop, etc.)?

- a. Yes b. No

22. Approximately how many apparel products do you purchase from fast-fashion stores (e.g., H&M, Zara, Forever 21, Gap, Top Shop, etc.) in a year?

- a. None b. 1-5 c. 6-10 d. 11-15
 e. 16-20 f. 21-25 g. 26-30 h. 31-35
 i. 36-40 j. 41-45 k. 46-50 l. Over 50

Directions: Please circle the number that best reflects your agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 5= Strongly Agree).

	Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
23. This shopping trip was truly a joy.	1	2	3	4	5
24. I continued to shop, not because I had to, but because I wanted to.	1	2	3	4	5
25. This shopping trip truly felt like an escape.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Compared to other things I could have done, the time spent shopping was truly enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5
27. I enjoyed being emerged in exciting new products.	1	2	3	4	5
28. I enjoyed this shopping trip for its own sake, not just for the items I may have purchased.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I had a good time because I was able to act on "the spur-of-the-moment".	1	2	3	4	5
30. During the trip, I felt the excitement of the hunt.	1	2	3	4	5
31. While shopping, I was able to forget my problems.	1	2	3	4	5
32. While shopping, I felt a sense of adventure.	1	2	3	4	5

33. This shopping trip was not a very nice time out.	1	2	3	4	5
34. I accomplished just what I wanted to on this shopping trip.	1	2	3	4	5
35. I couldn't buy what I really needed.	1	2	3	4	5
36. While shopping, I found just the item(s) I was looking for.	1	2	3	4	5
37. I was disappointed because I had to go to another store(s) to complete my shopping trip.	1	2	3	4	5

38. Have you shopped or purchased organic and/or eco-friendly apparel products (e.g., clothing, shoes, handbags, etc.)?

- a. Yes b. No

39. Approximately how many organic and/or eco-friendly apparel products do you purchase in a year?

- a. None b. 1-5 c. 6-10 d. 11-15
e. 16-20 f. 21-25 g. 26-30 h. 31-35
i. 36-40 j. 41-45 k. 46-50 l. Over 50

Directions: Please circle the number that best reflects your agreement with each statement using a 5-point scale (1= Very Infrequently; 5= Very Frequently).

		Very Infrequently		Very Frequently	
40. How frequently do you buy apparel made from recycled materials?	1	2	3	4	5
41. How frequently do you buy second-hand apparel?	1	2	3	4	5

42. How frequently do you purposely select fabrics that require cooler washing temperature, shorter drying time, or less ironing?	1	2	3	4	5
43. How frequently do you avoid an apparel product because of environmental concerns?	1	2	3	4	5
44. How frequently do you select apparel that you can wear over a longer term compared to trendy apparel that goes out of style quickly?	1	2	3	4	5
45. How frequently do you buy clothing made of organically grown natural fibers?	1	2	3	4	5
46. How frequently do you buy apparel with low impact or no dye processing?	1	2	3	4	5
47. How frequently do you buy apparel with environmentally friendly labeling or packaging techniques?	1	2	3	4	5

Directions: Please answer the questions that best matches your response

48. Age: _____ (number in years)

49. Gender:

- a. Male b. Female

50. Which the following best describes you?

- a. American Indian b. Asian, Pacific Islander
c. Black/African American d. Hispanic/Latino
e. White/Caucasian f. Other

51. What is your marital status?

- a. Married b. Not Married

52. What level are you in college credit hours?

- a. Freshman b. Sophomore c. Junior
d. Senior e. Graduate Student f. Other

Thank you for your time and participation!

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